

In 1918 a restricted number of women gained the right to vote for the first time.

Although they were paid less than men for the same work, women war workers also enjoyed the freedom which a job and a wage gave them. Even when they lost their jobs after the war, their self-respect and confidence was not lost. Women in the 1920s demanded, and received, more freedom than they had ever had before the war. Relations between the sexes in Britain were never the same again.

Food.

All European countries had to import some of their food to feed their population. As food supplies from overseas were disrupted by the U-boat war, people began to suffer. There were shortages of meat, sugar, and butter. Basic foods, like bread and potatoes, were in short supply. A system of voluntary rationing, introduced in 1915, did not work very well. Compulsory rationing, and ration books, were not introduced until 1918. However, some people did quite well out of the war: workers in certain key jobs were not allowed to join up and earned good money. The owners of firms supplying the armies did well and prospered.

The war at sea.

The Kaiser had built up the German navy before the war, but the British navy was still much stronger. As soon as the war started the British navy blockaded all German ports. This cut off supplies of raw materials, machine tools and food to Germany. This gradual stranglehold on Germany was an important cause of its defeat. No country can fight a war for very long if it has no raw materials for its industries.

Germany was soon very short of food as well. The winter of 1916-1917 was called the 'Turnip' Winter in Germany because turnips were almost all that the people had to eat.

When war broke out, several German surface raiders were on the high seas. But they were soon caught and put out of action.

The admirals on both sides were very cautious. They both realised that if they lost a major sea battle they could 'lose the war in an afternoon'. The British tried to tempt the Germans into leaving their bases at Kiel and Wilhelmshaven, while the Germans tried to lure the British out of Scapa Flow and Rosyth. Early in the war, before the blockade was fully enforced, there were minor battles between cruisers at Heligoland in 1914 and at the Dogger Bank in the following year. Several German cruisers slipped out of port and shelled Yarmouth, Scarborough and Hartlepool before being driven off. By late 1915, however, both fleets were firmly anchored in port, behind a forest of mines and submarine nets. The German fleet in the Pacific was destroyed at the Battle of the Falkland Islands. By early 1915 the only German battleships left were penned up in German ports by the Allied blockade.

From 1915 onwards the Germans tried to tip the balance of the naval war their way by using submarines (U-boats) to sink ships bringing supplies to Britain.

Any ship heading for Britain was declared a target. In May 1915 the passenger liner Lusitania sailing between the USA and Britain was sunk by a German U-boat. Over 1,000 passengers were killed. Many passengers were Americans, and the killing of American civilians produced a wave of strong anti-German feeling in the USA. U-boat warfare was cut down on the Kaiser's orders.

The Battle of Jutland.

The main German High Seas Fleet had to act. The Germans knew they could not take on the entire British Grand Fleet but hoped to lure them into a surprise trap of submarines. On 30 May 1916 the German fleet left port with the cruisers leading the way as a bait to lure out the British fleet. On the same day Admiral Jellicoe, leading the British fleet, put to sea. The two fleets, 259 ships in all, met off the coast of Denmark in the Battle of Jutland.

Smoke, mist and nightfall prevented a really decisive outcome. Both fleets returned home, the British having lost 14 ships and 6,000 men. German losses were 11 ships and 2,500 men. The battle highlighted weaknesses in British gunnery, armour and signalling.

However, the British fleet was still in control of the North Sea. As a New York newspaper put it, 'the German fleet has assaulted its jailer but remains in jail'. The great German fleet now rested at anchor until the war ended, by which time the sailors were ready to mutiny.

The convoy system.

The Germans now had to return to unrestricted U-boat warfare — sinking everything on the high seas — as their only hope of winning the war. They nearly succeeded; British merchant ships were sunk in large numbers. In March and April 1917, 600 ships were sunk, amounting to nearly 1,000,000 tons of shipping in April. At one point London was reduced to only two days' supply of food.

Then a change of Prime Minister brought a change of tactics. David Lloyd George took over from Herbert Asquith and introduced a convoy system.

In this system, merchant ships sailed in large groups escorted by fast destroyers. Although convoy escorts sank relatively few U-boats, they did make it much more difficult for U-boats to attack. Sea defences were also strengthened, and thousands of mines were laid in the English Channel and the North Sea. Gradually the situation improved and the emergency passed. Britain never suffered the severe shortages of food and other imported goods that Germany did.

Although there were no large, decisive sea battles, the war at sea was an important element in deciding the result of the First World War.

The war in the air.

Aeroplanes were still new inventions in 1914, and the part they could play in war had not really been thought out. At first they were used for reconnaissance

— to find out what the enemy was doing. The light open planes could easily fly over enemy lines to take photographs. Soon, however, new developments took place. Fighter planes were designed and built. Planes were developed to carry bombs, although these were small and did little damage.

People began to realise the potential of air warfare. The Royal Flying Corps, which had been founded in April 1912, became the basis of the Royal Air Force in 1918.

Both sides also used airships during the war. At that time they could fly faster and carry more arms than aeroplanes. German Zeppelins bombed London and other British cities. Towards the end of the war large Gotha bombers also raided London.

During the war the size, efficiency and speed of aircraft improved. Both sides learned a great deal about aircraft design, and huge numbers of aircraft were produced. Although the number of people killed in air raids was not large, it became obvious that in any future war civilians would suffer even if they were many miles away from the fighting itself.

THE WAR ON OTHER FRONTS.

The Eastern Front.

Russia soon fell back on the Eastern Front. The brave attacks it launched into Germany in 1914 could not be kept up. The Germans stopped the Russian advance at Tannenberg and the Masurian Lakes.

In 1915, German and Austrian troops advanced steadily. The huge Russian army could not stop them. The Russian soldiers fought bravely, but they were short of guns, ammunition, supplies and food. Their road and railway systems were not able to take the strain of war. Russian military commanders, led personally by the Tsar, were often incompetent. General Brusilov led a successful Russian counter-attack in 1916, but this put an even greater strain on the Russian economy. There were strikes and riots at home.

In March 1917, there was a revolution | and in January 1918, the new Communist rulers of Russia made peace with Germany. Germany gained hundreds of square kilometres of Russia, and could now throw all its strength into the Western Front.

Italy.

Italy was allied to Germany and Austria-Hungary in 1914. The Italians stayed neutral at first, then in 1915 declared war on Austria- Hungary. They hoped to share some land on the Austrian border and a share in the German colonies if the Central Powers were defeated. A most unusual and difficult war was fought for two years, high up in the mountains and valleys of the Alps.

In 1917 Germany had to send help to the Austrians and brought about a major Italian defeat at Caporetto. This left the Italians angry and ashamed, with important results for Italy after the war.

The Middle East.

In the Middle East, British forces attacked the Turkish empire. Their efforts were greatly helped by a British officer, Colonel T. E. Lawrence, 'Lawrence of Arabia'. He encouraged the Arabs to fight a guerrilla war against the Turks.

By the end of the war the British had captured Syria, Palestine and Mesopotamia from the Turks.

Gallipoli.

In 1915-1916 Turkey itself was attacked. The attack was the idea of the British First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill. His plan was to break the deadlock on the Western Front by attacking the Central Powers from a completely new direction. The attack could also open up a route by which supplies could be sent to the Russians. Troops were landed at Gallipoli in a combined army and navy operation. The Turkish soldiers, however, fought bravely and well. The Allied forces were unable to move more than a few kilometres inland. The bravery of the Anzacs — the Australian and New Zealand troops — became a legend, but the Gallipoli campaign failed. After eight months of tough fighting the Allied troops withdrew.